

**COPING STRATEGIES OF FIRST-YEAR COLLEGE STUDENTS TO DISTANCE LEARNING  
AT UNIVERSITY OF SANTO TOMAS – LEGAZPI**

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**ABSTRACT**

The emergence of COVID-19 in many parts of the world troubled almost all areas of human life. People from all walks of life had to deal with stress, anxiety, and uncertainty. This global pandemic has changed strategies that have been traditionally used in the teaching-learning process towards online or various modality teaching formats in universities around the world. University of Santo Tomas-Legazpi (UST-L) created FDoMe which involves synchronous, asynchronous, and modular types of delivery instructions. Because of this paradigm shift, this study was conducted to determine the different ways first-year college students do to manage the difficulties they encounter in the new learning scheme, compare the strategies the students practiced based on gender (male and female) and the program they are taking (board and non-board) and summarize the underlying factors that trigger their coping strategies relative to distance learning being implemented at the University of Santo Tomas-Legazpi. The participants were 192 freshmen students from the different colleges of UST-L. An online survey method was employed using the COPE survey questionnaire. Microsoft Excel was used for coding the questionnaire and analysis of data. Descriptive analysis, such as the means and standard deviation were employed to present the data obtained. T-test was also performed to determine the significant differences ( $p < 0.05$ ) between the levels of respondents namely: (1) board, (2) non-board, (3) female, (4) male, and (5) overall population.

The results of this study revealed that regardless of gender (male or female) and programs (board and non-board), both shared the same approach as to what extent they should adapt or helped them based on the situation. Furthermore, given the 11 categories, emotional consolation by means of praying showed the highest coping strategy followed by time management and self-regulation. Middle or average coping was to task preparation, emotional consolation through crying, teacher/s support, attention and focus, and peer/s support. While least coping was observed in searching for a perfect place and time and availability of learning resources.

*Keywords: Coping strategies, distance learning, COVID-19 pandemic, synchronous, asynchronous, FDoMe*

## **Introduction**

The novel coronavirus or known as COVID-19 begins in Wuhan, China, in late December 2019. This infectious disease rapidly spread throughout the world, and it was declared by WHO to be a pandemic on March 11, 2020 (Xiang et al., 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic has caused havoc in our daily life. Government officials in many countries implemented a “stay-at-home” policy, and numerous activities are strictly regulated to prevent virus transmission (Munastiwi & Puryono, 2021). Many establishments were temporarily closed, making a significant impact on the world economy, social systems, healthcare system, and Education in particular.

Education is considered to be a human right. It is an enabling right that has a direct impact on all other human rights. However, the education system has no exception to the hindrance of COVID-19. Of the 190 countries, 1.6 billion students were affected. Closing schools and other learning spaces have impacted 94% of the world's student population, with up to 99% in low and lower-middle-income nations. Immediate action is acted upon to avoid the learning crisis from becoming a generational disaster (UN, 2020). Several countries have transitioned from traditional classes to distance learning or online learning; teachers and students can connect through different e-learning platforms. In some circumstances, national

Distance learning can be in the form of a synchronous or asynchronous platform. Synchronous is the real-time delivery of instruction and requires the teacher and student to have a fast and consistent internet connection while asynchronous is the self-paced and non-simultaneous delivery of instructions (Oztok et al., 2013).

Integrating technology into various learning modalities has been around for many years. These technologies benefit the students and teachers by being technologically inclined and introducing them to 21st-century skills. Online learning was created to increase the quality of remote education by allowing for more and better interaction between students and teachers. In addition, online learning increases the engagement and motivation of students (Intel, 2009; Gonzales et al., 2020).

In this Covid-19 outbreak, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are increasingly embracing distance online teaching-learning, and they have resorted to online classrooms or E-Learning classrooms to deliver the material of their curriculum on multiple platforms (Chua et al., 2020). The University of Santo- Tomas, Legazpi established the Flexible Dominican Education (FDomE) to offer the best quality education that student deserves even during the pandemic. It is a one-of-a-kind combination of

technology-enhanced learning engagement composed of several modified learning modalities. FDomE is through various online platforms with the university's traditional onsite learning delivery style. Currently, the university is adopting three modes with synchronous or asynchronous learning. The other modes include onsite learning, which will be conducted inside the university if the situation permits. The core of FDomE is the student, and his or her learning requirements must be met using whatever technology is available.

With this new normal in the educational system, students are provided with a set of modules to work on, and many of them faced different challenges. A common struggle that the students are experiencing is adaptability. The abrupt shift from face-to-face to online instruction creates a completely different environment for students. It might be too overwhelming, and the students may have a hard time coping with this setup. Also, technical issues are an inevitable struggle that the students are experiencing. Due to a lack of a consistent internet connection, several students were having difficulty keeping up with their virtual classes. Furthermore, not all students own a computer or cellphone, which are both required for distance learning. With this, students might be feeling they are being left behind and demotivated as the set of activities given continues to pile up.

severity on education left many students physically and psychologically unprepared to deal with the circumstance. Students displayed a wide range of responses in interpreting, accepting, and coping with the new setup in education. However, even though distance learning has brought many challenges and anxieties, students still manage to cope with this stressful time. As people encounter challenges in their day-to-day activities, coping strategies turned out to be their immediate response to stay on track and continue being mentally and emotionally healthy. Coping strategies are psychological patterns that people employ to deal with their thoughts, emotions and how they detect, assess, and learn from stressful situations (Franklin, et. al., 2018; Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2016).

While these coping styles are being practiced since man became aware of his surroundings, this reached its peak during the time of COVID-19 as this pandemic brought severe effects to the different sectors specifically education. With the strict implementation of health protocols, distance learning developed to be the primary method of educational instruction in most countries across the globe and paved the way for it to be adopted, utilized, and improved. But just like with other educational programs, it comes with pros and cons.

In an exploratory case study, an article written by Oliveira et al, a methodological

procedure was used in identifying the different advantages and disadvantages of distance learning. From the student's perspective, flexibility (in terms of time and policy) is considered its main benefit. Additionally, availability and low cost are also seen as advantageous to students' distance learning experience. In contrast to these, discipline and easy access to teachers are regarded to represent a problem when not properly taken care of. Similarly, Sadeghi in their study states the good and bad sides of distance learning to students. The researcher discussed six advantages, and all indicate the convenience it brings in terms of time, place, money, transportation, and livelihood. On the other hand, Sadeghi emphasized that it also comes with disadvantages. While there are benefits behind the execution of distance learning, its downsides seemed to pose a huge influence on students' learning process. Sadeghi stated its five drawbacks, and all pointed to distraction, complicated technology, lack of social interaction, communication delay with instructors, and weak employment security. However, the following issues are not taken into account in Sadeghi's study: less time spent learning, stress symptoms, a change in the way students interact, and a lack of learning motivation (Di Pietro et al., 2020). In this report, these channels were indicated to possibly affect students' learning. One important factor cited here is stress symptoms. Students who are isolated at home may feel more stressed and

anxious. Such adverse psychological factors may in turn have a detrimental effect on learning (Kuban & Steele, 2011). But despite the negativities that distance learning gives to some students, they still find alternative ways to reduce them and remain focused and motivated.

Before the school year: 2020-2021 started, the University of Santo Tomas- Legazpi prepared a new learning scheme called the FDomE. Also, the university surveyed as to what kind of distance learning the student will get (Synchronous or Asynchronous). And this study was conducted to assess the coping strategies of freshmen students because this can help other students and the educational institution by improving their different learning modalities to provide the quality education that the students deserve.

This study aimed to determine the different ways first-year college students do to manage the difficulties they encounter in the new learning scheme. Specifically, this aimed to compare the strategies the students practiced based on gender (male and female) and the program they are taking (board and non-board). Furthermore, to summarize the underlying factors that trigger their coping strategies relative to distance learning being implemented at the University of Santo Tomas-Legazpi.

## **Methodology**

### ***Research Design***

This study used a descriptive survey method of research. Fraenkel and Wallen (1993) described a descriptive survey as a method used to explain, analyze, and classify something. It also produced a suitable number of responses, present a significant picture of events, and seek out to elucidate people’s perceptions and characteristics that may relate to particular behavioral patterns or attitudes (Zurmuehlin, 1981) based on the obtained information. Furthermore, this could also be used with bigger confidence concerning specific questions relevant to the interest and value of the researchers. These reasons posed an excellent choice of descriptive study for the study.

### ***Sampling***

The target population was freshmen college students at the University of Santo Tomas – Legazpi (UST-L) because they are the most affected compared to higher years since they are just entering their field of choice which will bring them to their future career. The representative sample size was adopted from Oribhabor & Anyawu (2019) which was suggested by Dillman (2000). The given overall population of UST-L freshmen students was 682, thus, the same size was computed using the formula:

$$n = \frac{[(N) (p)(1 - p)]}{[(N - 1) (\frac{B}{C})^2 + (p)(1 - p)]}$$

Where:

n = computed sample size needed for the desired level of precision

N = population size

P = proportion of population expected to choose

B= acceptable amount of sampling error, or precision

C= Z statistic associated with the confidence level

The confidence level used was 90% having a Z score of 1.645. B can be set at 0.1, 0.05, or 0.03, which are ± 10, 5, or 3% of the true population value, respectively. The sampling error or precision is set at 0.05 or 5%, the acceptable amount which will also lead to greater sample size than using 0.03. However, it provides at all times a sufficient sample size for a smaller or greater population (Biemer & Lyberg, 2003). Furthermore, the minimum sample size needed to achieve a confidence level for a proportion of a population with a given maximum error can always be estimated and if there is prior knowledge with regards to the population proportion *p*, then the estimate can be sharpened (Introductory Statistics).

Based on the formula, the sample size obtained was 192, Table 1.

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Board</b>	<b>Non-Board</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>Female</b>	120	15	<b>135</b>
<b>Male</b>	48	9	<b>57</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>192</b>

Although UST-L has four departments namely: (1) College of Arts Sciences and Education - CASE, (2) College of Business Management and Accountancy - CBMA, (3) College of Health Sciences – CHS, and (4) College of Engineering, Architecture and Fine Arts – CEAFA, the sample distribution was not randomized but it is considered adequate to demonstrate the purpose of this study. The respondents were selected based on their capacity and willingness to furnish the needed data and taking also into consideration their availability at the time of the data gathering.

### ***Data Collection Tools and Methods***

The instrument used in this study is a brief Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced (COPE) questionnaire with few modifications. This questionnaire is a multi-dimensional inventory to assess the different coping strategies used in response to stress (Mead, 2021) which was developed by Charles S. Carver in 1997. This was previously published as COPE inventory created by Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub in 1989. Usually, the COPE questionnaire was consisting of 28 questions, comprising the 14 subscales with two items each, which are active coping, planning, positive reframing, acceptance, humor, religion, using

However, in this study, we modified the COPE questionnaire considering the possible factors that might affect the execution of the students to distance learning. The questionnaire was made up of 31 questions composed of 11 subscales or categories with 2-4 coping strategies each. The coping strategies used were adopted from the study of Rotas & Cahapay, 2021.

The researcher asked first for the permission of each department head, then, the survey questionnaire was distributed to all the programs of the departments through google forms. The data were retrieved using google docs since the sample distribution was not randomized. Subsequently, the data used in the analysis was the first 192 responses, the desired number of samples needed.

### ***Data Analysis***

A manual approach using Microsoft Excel was used for coding the questionnaire and analysis of data. Descriptive analysis, such as the means and standard deviation were employed to present the data obtained.

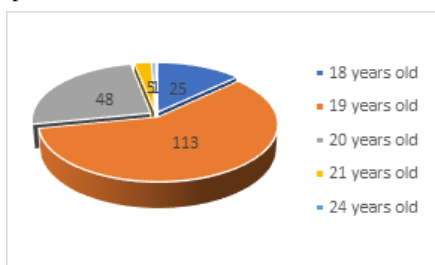
T-test was also performed to determine the significant differences ( $p < 0.05$ ) between the levels of respondents namely: (1) board, (2)

non-board, (3) female, (4) male, and (5) overall population.

### Results

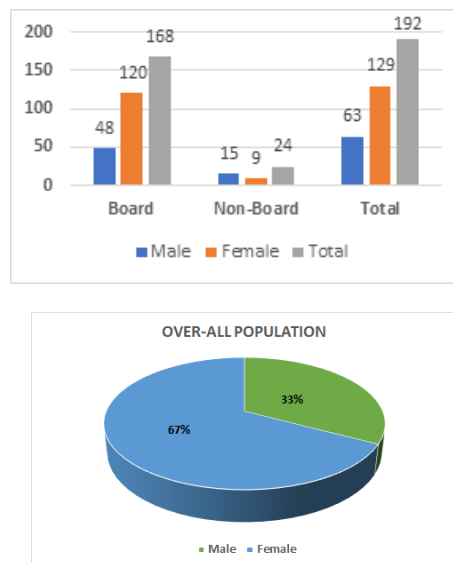
The responses of this study were first distributed based on their age, gender, and the program they are taking. Figure 1, indicates that the majority of the respondents were under 19 years old, having 58.9% or 113 out of the total participants which was 192. Then, followed by 20 years old with 25%, 18 years old with 13%, 21 years old with 2.6%, and 24 with 0.5%, respectively.

**Figure 1.** Age distribution of first-year college students participated.



As to their gender, compared to males' females come with the biggest percentage which makes up 67% of the total population, as shown in figure 2. Meanwhile, most of the respondents were taking board programs with 88%. The programs they are taking were BS Accountancy, BS Psychology, BS Nursing, BS Medical Technology, BS Pharmacy, BS Architecture, and BS Civil Engineering. Conversely, respondents from the non-board program were taking AB Political Science, BS Tourism Management, BS Hospitality Management, BS Industrial Engineering, BS Computer Science, BS

**Figure 2.** Distribution of the first-year college students participated by gender and program they are taking.



This study used a Brief COPE questionnaire with 1-4 scoring. 1 corresponds to I usually don't do this at all, 2 was I usually do this a little bit, 3 for I usually do this a medium amount and 4 was I usually do this a lot. The mean of means score was obtained from the different strategies indicated in the questionnaire. Based on the mean of means, coping strategies predominantly used by the freshmen students at the University of Santo Tomas-Legazpi were ascertained and Table 2 was used to measure the strength of their coping strategies from the factors stated in the survey questionnaire.

The mean score indicates adaptive coping or greater use and/or perceived helpfulness of the indicated coping strategy.

**Table 2.** Criteria in determining the way the students deal with the different challenges.

Mean rating range	Usage/Interpretation
0.1-1.0	I usually don't do this at all
1.1-2.0	I usually do this a little bit
2.1-3.0	I usually do this a medium amount
3.1-4.0	I usually do this a lot

Tables 3 and 4 summarize the results of the mean of means score of 192 freshmen students based on their gender and the programs they are taking.

**Table 3.** Coping Strategies to distance learning by the students enrolled in board and non-board programs.

Category	BOARD				NON-BOARD			
	Overall Mean (SD)	Male Mean (SD)	Female Mean (SD)	SIG	Overall Mean (SD)	Male Mean (SD)	Female Mean (SD)	SIG
<b>1 Searching for a Perfect Place and Time</b>								
Whenever I have an online class, I went to my relative's house since we don't have an internet connection at home.	1.78 (0.11)	1.69 (0.19)	1.82 (0.14)	0.181	1.54 (0.24)	1.56 (0.38)	1.53 (0.31)	0.545
I had to go to another barangay or village just to have a stable internet connection.	1.61 (0.10)	1.58 (0.18)	1.63 (0.12)	0.285	1.29 (0.16)	1.44 (0.31)	1.20 (0.16)	0.649
I roam around the house to find a better internet connection. If none I will be studying outside the house.	2.29 (0.15)	2.44 (0.31)	2.23 (0.18)	0.025 *	2.13 (0.38)	2.22 (0.70)	2.07 (0.44)	0.360
I am an evening person. I usually prepare and submit my tasks at midnight because it is only the time that we have a fast internet	3.03 (0.21)	2.96 (0.38)	3.06 (0.24)	0.099	2.54 (0.46)	2.56 (0.79)	2.53 (0.57)	0.069



connection.									
<b>2</b>	<b>Availability of Learning Resources</b>								
	I borrow gadgets like smartphone from my brother/sister, whenever there is an application needed for the completion of my requirements.	1.66 (0.10)	1.71 (0.20)	1.64 (0.12)	0.271	1.42 (0.19)	1.22 (0.22)	1.53 (0.27)	0.603
	I borrow a computer/laptop just to finish my task because my smartphone is not sufficient to complete the tasks.	1.80 (0.12)	1.92 (0.24)	1.76 (0.14)	0.249	1.63 (0.24)	1.89 (0.50)	1.47 (0.25)	0.545
<b>3</b>	<b>Peer/s support</b>								
	I always ask my classmates if I do not understand the lessons and instructions.	2.71 (0.18)	2.60 (0.32)	2.76 (0.22)	0.103	2.38 (0.41)	2.56 (0.74)	2.27 (0.48)	0.404
	If I don't have an internet connection, I ask my closest classmates to check our google classroom if there are posted activities.	2.48 (0.17)	2.65 (0.33)	2.42 (0.19)	0.018 *	2.21 (0.39)	2.33 (0.68)	2.13 (0.47)	0.235
	We discuss online to understand more of the lessons, get more ideas, and help each other so that no one will be left behind.	2.46 (0.16)	2.58 (0.32)	2.42 (0.19)	0.051 *	2.21 (0.39)	2.22 (0.63)	2.20 (0.50)	0.143
<b>4</b>	<b>Teacher/s support</b>								
	I message my teacher/s whenever I have concerns regarding internet connection, e.i, cannot attend online class due to no or unstable internet	2.95 (0.20)	2.96 (0.37)	2.95 (0.23)	0.087	3.04 (0.54)	2.78 (0.79)	3.20 (0.72)	0.404

connection.								
If I am having difficulties in understanding the lesson or given requirements, I ask questions to the teacher/s.	2.45 (0.16)	2.67 (0.34)	2.37 (0.18)	0.047 *	2.54 (0.44)	2.33 (0.63)	2.67 (0.60)	0.417
I humbly message my teacher/s with my concerns and fortunately, they also give considerations.	2.70 (0.18)	2.75 (0.34)	2.68 (0.21)	0.078	3.04 (0.54)	2.89 (0.83)	3.13 (0.70)	0.376
<b>5 Time Management</b>								
I prepare a checklist of all the things that I must do to organize all the things that I should do.	3.26 (0.22)	2.79 (0.35)	3.44 (0.27)	0.296	2.79 (0.50)	2.22 (0.61)	3.13 (0.71)	0.429
I have lists of all my tasks in the paper for me to see them, so I can choose which to be prioritized and accomplish first.	3.26 (0.22)	2.75 (0.35)	3.47 (0.28)	0.321	2.75 (0.50)	2.00 (0.54)	3.20 (0.73)	0.479
I answer my worksheets at night because I do have lots of work to do in the morning.	3.22 (0.22)	2.81 (0.36)	3.38 (0.27)	0.257	3.17 (0.57)	2.78 (0.82)	3.40 (0.77)	0.470
<b>6 Task Preparation</b>								
I download ahead of time in Google classroom all the needed materials and modules.	3.15 (0.21)	3.00 (0.37)	3.22 (0.25)	0.185	3.38 (0.60)	3.33 (0.97)	3.40 (0.76)	0.488
I prepare and submit the requirements earlier so that I could still have time for the other	2.77 (0.18)	2.54 (0.31)	2.86 (0.23)	0.078	2.92 (0.51)	2.67 (0.75)	3.07 (0.69)	0.404

subject requirements.

I stay up all night to understand the lessons. I read repeatedly the materials.	3.05 (0.20)	2.94 (0.37)	3.10 (0.24)	0.175	2.92 (0.51)	2.78 (0.77)	3.00 (0.67)	0.376
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**7 Attention and Focus**

I have time with my family to lessen the stress that I experience from the modular learning system.	2.57 (0.17)	2.35 (0.30)	2.66 (0.21)	0.026 *	2.33 (0.42)	2.00 (0.54)	2.53 (0.60)	0.343
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I do things that can make me happy like planting, watering our plants, playing with dogs, and watching movies.	2.81 (0.19)	2.73 (0.34)	2.84 (0.23)	0.034 *	2.58 (0.46)	2.33 (0.65)	2.73 (0.63)	0.207
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I take a short break for at least fifteen minutes from time to time when I am too tired.	3.11 (0.21)	2.94 (0.37)	3.18 (0.26)	0.163	2.75 (0.48)	2.44 (0.67)	2.93 (0.66)	0.390
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Coffee is enough for me to reduce my stress.	2.35 (0.17)	2.06 (0.27)	2.47 (0.21)	0.069	1.88 (0.34)	1.56 (0.44)	2.07 (0.48)	0.429
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**8 Self-Regulation**

I bear in mind that no subject is difficult to handle if I want to learn and achieve my goal in life.	3.04 (0.20)	2.94 (0.36)	3.08 (0.24)	0.147	2.83 (0.50)	2.56 (0.72)	3.00 (0.67)	0.305
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I train myself to regain focus every time I seem to lose one so that I will not be left behind.	3.22 (0.21)	3.04 (0.37)	3.29 (0.26)	0.231	2.88 (0.51)	2.78 (0.77)	2.93 (0.67)	0.325
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Every time I feel down, I try hard to persuade my mind	3.19 (0.22)	2.88 (0.36)	3.32 (0.27)	0.232	2.83 (0.51)	2.44 (0.68)	3.07 (0.71)	0.390
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to be optimistic at all times.

<b>9 Emotional consolation: Crying</b>								
There are times that I cry because I do not know which activity to finish and submit first.	2.90 (0.20)	2.31 (0.30)	3.14 (0.25)	0.137	2.46 (0.45)	1.56 (0.42)	3.00 (0.68)	0.404
I breakdown and cry. I take a break this way but then I go back to my paper works after a while.	3.02 (0.21)	2.31 (0.30)	3.31 (0.27)	0.222	2.71 (0.49)	2.00 (0.57)	3.13 (0.70)	0.404
<b>10 Emotional consolation: Praying</b>								
Praying that my teachers would understand my unintended shortcomings.	3.41 (0.23)	3.08 (0.39)	3.54 (0.28)	0.352	2.71 (0.51)	2.44 (0.75)	2.87 (0.69)	0.390
I always pray to God to give me the strength to overcome this situation and keeping faith that everything will be back to normal.	3.63 (0.24)	3.35 (0.42)	3.73 (0.30)	0.470	3.17 (0.59)	3.11 (0.96)	3.20 (0.75)	0.577
<b>11 Looking for Extra Jobs</b>								
I accept tutorials in exchange for the internet load I needed.	1.43 (0.09)	1.48 (0.17)	1.42 (0.10)	0.418	1.29 (0.19)	1.56 (0.44)	1.13 (0.13)	0.673
I use my extra time to sell different products (ei. baked, products, barbecue, beauty products, etc.) just to earn money for the budget of my internet load.	1.61 (0.11)	1.46 (0.17)	1.68 (0.13)	0.338	1.88 (0.33)	1.78 (0.50)	1.93 (0.44)	0.390

\* statistical significance at  $p < 0.05$

**Table 3.** Coping Strategies to distance learning by the students using the overall population and by gender.

Category		<b>FEMALE Mean (SD)</b>	<b>Male Mean (SD)</b>	<b>TOTAL Mean (SD)</b>	<b>SIG</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Searching for a Perfect Place and Time</b>				
	Whenever I have an online class, I went to my relative's house since we don't have an internet connection at home.	1.79 (0.13)	1.67 (0.17)	1.75 (0.10)	0.217
	I had to go to another barangay or village just to have a stable internet connection.	1.58 (0.11)	1.56 (0.16)	1.57 (0.09)	0.330
	I roam around the house to find a better internet connection. If none I will be studying outside the house.	2.21 (0.16)	2.40 (0.28)	2.27 (0.14)	0.035*
	I am an evening person. I usually prepare and submit my tasks at midnight because it is only the time that we have a fast internet connection.	3.00 (0.23)	2.89 (0.34)	2.97 (0.19)	0.083
<b>2</b>	<b>Availability of Learning Resources</b>				
	I borrow gadgets like smartphone from my brother/sister, whenever there is an application needed for the completion of my requirements.	1.63 (0.11)	1.63 (0.17)	1.63 (0.09)	0.297
	I borrow a computer/laptop just to finish my task because my smartphone is not sufficient to complete the tasks.	1.73 (0.13)	1.91 (0.22)	1.78 (0.11)	0.266
<b>3</b>	<b>Peer/s support</b>				
	I always ask my classmates if I do not understand the lessons and instructions.	2.70 (0.20)	2.60 (0.29)	2.67 (0.16)	0.114
	If I don't have an internet connection, I ask my closest classmates to check our google classroom if there are posted activities.	2.39 (0.18)	2.60 (0.30)	2.45 (0.15)	0.022*
	We discuss online to understand more of the lessons, get more ideas, and help each other so that no one will be left behind.	2.39 (0.18)	2.53 (0.29)	2.43 (0.15)	0.044*
<b>4</b>	<b>Teacher/s support</b>				
	I message my teacher/s whenever I have concerns regarding internet connection, e.i, cannot attend online class due to no or unstable internet connection.	2.98 (0.22)	2.93 (0.34)	2.96 (0.19)	0.107
	If I am having difficulties in understanding the lesson or given requirements, I ask questions to the teacher/s.	2.40 (0.18)	2.61 (0.30)	2.46 (0.15)	0.052*

	I humbly message my teacher/s with my concerns and fortunately, they also give considerations.	2.73 (0.20)	2.77 (0.32)	2.74 (0.17)	0.089
<b>5</b>	<b>Time Management</b>				
	I prepare a checklist of all the things that I must do to organize all the things that I should do.	3.41 (0.26)	2.70 (0.31)	3.20 (0.20)	0.297
	I have lists of all my tasks in the paper for me to see them, so I can choose which to be prioritized and accomplish first.	3.44 (0.26)	2.63 (0.31)	3.20 (0.20)	0.324
	I answer my worksheets at night because I do have lots of work to do in the morning.	3.39 (0.25)	2.81 (0.33)	3.21 (0.20)	0.275
<b>6</b>	<b>Task Preparation</b>				
	I download ahead of time in Google classroom all the needed materials and modules.	3.24 (0.24)	3.05 (0.35)	3.18 (0.20)	0.209
	I prepare and submit the requirements earlier so that I could still have time for the other subject requirements.	2.88 (0.21)	2.56 (0.29)	2.79 (0.17)	0.098
	I stay up all night to understand the lessons. I read repeatedly the materials.	3.09 (0.23)	2.91 (0.33)	3.04 (0.19)	0.186
<b>7</b>	<b>Attention and Focus</b>				
	I have time with my family to lessen the stress that I experience from the modular learning system.	2.64 (0.20)	2.30 (0.26)	2.54 (0.16)	0.022*
	I do things that can make me happy like planting, watering our plants, playing with dogs, and watching movies.	2.83 (0.21)	2.67 (0.31)	2.78 (0.18)	0.034*
	I take a short break for at least fifteen minutes from time to time when I am too tired.	3.15 (0.24)	2.86 (0.33)	3.06 (0.19)	0.161
	Coffee is enough for me to reduce my stress.	2.42 (0.19)	1.98 (0.24)	2.29 (0.15)	0.078
<b>8</b>	<b>Self-Regulation</b>				
	I bear in mind that no subject is difficult to handle if I want to learn and achieve my goal in life.	3.07 (0.23)	2.88 (0.33)	3.02 (0.19)	0.157
	I train myself to regain focus every time I seem to lose one so that I will not be left behind.	3.25 (0.24)	3.00 (0.34)	3.18 (0.20)	0.232

	Every time I feel down, I try hard to persuade my mind to be optimistic at all times.	3.29 (0.25)	2.81 (0.32)	3.15 (0.20)	0.238
<b>9</b>	<b>Emotional consolation: Crying</b>				
	There are times that I cry because I do not know which activity to finish and submit first.	3.13 (0.24)	2.19 (0.26)	2.85 (0.18)	0.147
	I breakdown and cry. I take a break this way but then I go back to my paper works after a while.	3.29 (0.25)	2.26 (0.27)	2.98 (0.19)	0.227
<b>10</b>	<b>Emotional consolation: Praying</b>				
	Praying that my teachers would understand my unintended shortcomings.	3.37 (0.26)	2.98 (0.35)	3.32 (0.21)	0.344
	I always pray to God to give me the strength to overcome this situation and keeping faith that everything will be back to normal.	3.67 (0.28)	3.32 (0.39)	3.57 (0.23)	0.474
<b>11</b>	<b>Looking for Extra Jobs</b>				
	I accept tutorials in exchange for the internet load I needed.	1.39 (0.09)	1.49 (0.16)	1.42 (0.08)	0.449
	I use my extra time to sell different products (ie. baked products, barbecues, beauty products, etc.) just to earn money for the budget of my internet load.	1.70 (0.13)	1.51 (0.16)	1.65 (0.10)	0.337

\* Statistical significance at  $p < 0.05$

### Discussion

The implementation of distance learning in various schools amidst the COVID-19 crisis creates hurdles but also drives students to survive despite all the challenges they have encountered throughout the academic year. This study aimed to determine the different ways first-year college students do to manage the difficulties they encounter in the new learning scheme, compare their strategies in terms of gender (male and female) and the program they are taking (board and non-board), and summarize the underlying factors that trigger their coping strategies relative to distance learning being implemented at the UST-L.

There were 11 categories used in this study.

The results showed that in all categories students have different ways of coping with the different factors associated with distance learning. This is specified by the mean value at all levels. Based on the means, male and female students regardless of their programs (board or non-board) shared the same approach as to what extent they should adapt or helped them based on the situation. Although there are coping strategies that showed a significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ), the majority presented no significant difference. This only means that all possibilities remain in the type of students coping strategies. Furthermore, the results of the standard

deviation emphasize that the responses were homogenous and very close to the mean. This emphasizes that students learn to adapt and have self-control. This means that students who tend to take control of and manage the situation have a lower level of anxiety about learning outcomes, and therefore show high levels of subjective well-being. This way of overcoming stress allows for minimizing anxiety with targeted control of behavior and the ability to self-organize (Vavilova, 2021). The result also confirmed the research of E. Skinner et al, that adaptive coping strategies are aimed at solving problems and providing a stable psychological state while maladaptive strategies involve escape from problems and thus determine anxiety and depression (Skinner et al, 2003; Cheng et al., 2014).

On the other hand, giving importance to each category, internet connection is the primary demand of distance learning, however, based on the Ookla Speedtest, in terms of average broadband and mobile speeds, the Philippines ranks at the lower part of the world index (Moneymax, 2021) which poses a great challenge to students particularly those that are from marginalized family (Rotas & Cahapay, 2020) and residing from rural areas. Most students cope by searching for a perfect place and time wherein they roam around their houses to find a better internet connection and his findings were also suggested by Cook (2019). However, the highest coping strategy of students

was to prepare and submit their tasks during midnight where there is fast internet connectivity. The same result was observed by Matswetu et al. (2020) wherein using WIFI at night avoids traffic to its spectrum since fewer people are competing for air space.

Students showed minimal coping with the availability of learning resources. This means that most UST-L freshmen students have the capacity to perform their tasks by having access to their own gadgets such as smartphones, laptops, or computers. Another coping strategy that was shown as average by the students was peer/s support. Bosio (2020) stated that this creates a strong relationship among students where it helps them to overcome the feeling of isolation (Wang, 2005). Kimotho, in his paper, stated that some students adopt positive methods such as seeking social support or using leisure activities while others use maladaptive strategies like escape/avoidance to manage stress. Other poor coping strategies include ignoring the problem, failure to seek help from others, and escapism through substance use. As a result, some students contemplate self-harm and suicide especially the young people who do not seek help or talk about their problems (Kimotho, 2018).

Non-board students showed a greater way of coping with teacher/s support whenever they have worries or concerns such as internet connection, their way of informing their teachers that they cannot attend online classes. As Talbott



(2017) stated, successful online or telephone systems as part of e-learning initiatives of institutions will provide avenues for students to peer-tutor and students will communicate well with their teachers. In this case, Barrett and Lally (2000) pointed out that virtual mentoring was used as a way of providing advice and guidance to students who were particularly new to distance learning, thus, it also becomes a basic education service.

With regards to time management, students showed good practice in doing their academic tasks by preparing a checklist to organize the things to do or what to prioritize which was also ascertained in the study of Joubert (2020) with which scheduling tasks help to improve students time management skills. Rotas & Cahapay (2020) also indicated that practicing time management, doing learning tasks ahead, and extending the time learning tasks are interconnected coping strategies because time management makes time flexible for the other tasks.

Meanwhile, distance learning generates various stressors that could affect students' mental capability. With the higher demands in academic workloads along with the high expectation of parents and teachers, students are still able to cope by taking a break and diverting their attention to leisure activities. This was also practiced by the students in the study of Shamsuddin et al., (2013) in response to stress.

Chandra also revealed some of the students' coping strategies through the use of their emotional intelligence. Through a telephonic conversation that was carried out with randomly selected 15 respondents, they shared how they are coping with the academic stress emerging out of the current scenario. Some of them are the following: taking online courses to get diverse technical skills, deciding to help in their family business, taking creative activities, doing household chores, tutoring younger siblings, and doing voluntary internships. All these activities (but not limited to) are giving them exposure to the world of work but also giving a sense of achievement and being a part of an organization that is motivating for many students and is helping them increase their productivity (Chandra, 2020).

Aside from the recreational skill approaches, students are also able to escape from the pressure and cope by regulating themselves and doing emotional consolation through crying and praying. The same result in the study of Kwaah & Essilfie in GHANA where praying/meditation shows a very important coping strategy for both male and female students. The use of prayer in solving social problems believed to be originated from religion, since in the Ghanaian environment, it plays an important role in solving problems that confront people, especially with issues that do not have social structures to mitigate their negative effects (Kwaah & Essilfie, 2017).

Arman (2019) concluded in their study that students create positive meaning in terms of personal growth to manage stress and feeling that stress they went through could change them in a good way. In the recent study conducted by Ocal (2021), they stated in normal times positive attitudes toward learning are important, however, in the present situation it was even more important because distance learning requires students to rely on intrinsic motivation and self-directed learning. Crying and praying were similar practices of the students in the study of Baloran (2020).

Furthermore, despite the tight schedule of academic tasks, some students were still able to take extra jobs to help themselves financially. It was reflected in the study conducted by Matswetu et al., (2020) where students struggle in raising money by doing buy and selling. This shows that students, with a driving force within them, can withstand anything as long as he knows what coping strategy to use with each dilemma he encounters.

The study of Sideridis (2008), reveals the five most frequently used coping strategies by students: browsing the internet, sleeping, and resting, watching TV shows or movies, and instant messaging. Conversely, Kimotho (2018), stated that while some students adopt positive methods such as seeking social support or using leisure activities, poor coping strategies are also being practiced by some students. These include maladaptive strategies like escape/avoidance to

manage stress, ignoring the problem, failure to seek help from others, and escapism through substance use. And this results in self-harm and suicide imagination especially young people. But one of the things that are probably missing in this time of 'social distancing' is students realizing that while keeping away from each other physically is important, doing so emotionally is not.

Coping strategies provide avenues to reduce the feeling of tension inside the body and eventually block its aftermath. Each person, specifically a student, has his own unique coping styles that may be different and ineffective to others but will not invalidate its use. One's coping strategy is unique and will only be justified through the result it brings to oneself.

### **Conclusion**

COVID-19 pandemic greatly impacted the Philippine education system. This study showed and concluded from the results that UST-L freshmen students have different ways of coping with the different factors associated with distance learning in several ways. This is specified by the mean value at all levels. Male and female students regardless of their programs (board or non-board) shared the same approach as to what extent they should adapt or helped them based on the situation. Although there are coping strategies that showed a significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ), the majority presented no significant difference. This only means that all

possibilities remain in the type of students coping strategies. Furthermore, the results of the standard deviation emphasize that the responses were homogenous and very close to the mean. This emphasizes that students learn to adapt and have self-control. And based on the 11 categories we could tell the greater coping employed by the students. Emotional consolation by means of praying showed the highest coping strategy followed by time management and self-regulation. Middle or average coping was to task preparation, emotional consolation through crying, teacher/s support, attention and focus, and peer/s support. While least coping was observed in searching for a perfect place and time and availability of learning resources.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the results and conclusion, we recommend strengthening or broadening schools' psychological services through counseling or mental health awareness because although students could cope through praying it is still best that they could feel that we are here for them. These services can be integrated into university, college, and course levels. Moreover, this study only focuses on the way students cope with the given categories, this only assesses how frequently they used the indicated coping strategy. Additionally, it only involved the freshmen students and not generalized the coping strategies of the population of all college students. Thus, based on this constraint, it is

suggested that future researchers should conduct an extension for the quantitative component through surveys that involves a larger population sample or research could also be conducted on the specific program levels. By doing this, it will provide a broader perspective regarding their coping strategies amidst this challenging time of COVID-19 crisis.

Further research could also be employed by exploring students coping strategies in response to the school's mode of instruction- the FDoMe. This approach could help administrators and instructors in creating appropriate learning instructions.

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